

ORM NEWS

From the Office of the
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs



December 2004

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



Holiday Greetings

As we close 2004 I want to again thank each of you for a very successful year in ORM. We made much progress in attaining our goals for the year and I am confident that we will continue to do so in 2005.

During this holiday season, I hope you take a moment to share the true meaning of the season with family, friends and those less fortunate.

Again, congratulations for all that you've done in 2004 and to each of you and your families – "Happy Holidays and a Happy New Year."

As we enter the new year, it is with great pleasure that I announce Ms. Rosa Franco, Northeastern Operations Regional EEO Officer, as the new Chief Operating Officer (COO) for ORM, effective December 12, 2004,

Ms. Franco's contributions over the years to ORM are commendable. I am confident she brings strong leadership skills, technical expertise, vision and new direction for operations in ORM.

Please join me in congratulating Ms. Franco.

James S. Jones

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Program Highlights

Counselor Root Cause Training

By Lillette Turner, Chief Policy Officer, Office of Policy and Compliance

Fifty-nine ORM Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) counselors have been certified as trained on the revised root cause categories. Guidance was also sent to all counselors on how to make the appropriate root cause selection(s) and how to enter the data in the Web Based Tracking System.

Counselors will only be required to submit case scenarios, as provided in the guidance, for the reporting period indicated in the schedule below. The Los Angeles and Houston ORM Field Offices should submit their case scenarios for the 1st quarter report by January 8, 2005.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| ▪ 1 st Quarter (January 8, 2005) | Los Angeles/Houston |
| ▪ 2 nd Quarter (April 5, 2005) | Washington/Little Rock |
| ▪ 3 rd Quarter (July 8, 2005) | Bay Pines/Lyons |
| ▪ 4 th Quarter (October 7, 2005) | Cleveland/Los Angeles |

Contact the Office of Policy and Compliance (OPC) at (202) 501-2680 if you have questions or for more information. ■

DAS for Resolution Management Presents ORM “Employer of Choice” Award to Northeastern Operations

On December 6, 2004, the DAS for Resolution Management began a two day trip to visit our Lyons, NJ field office of Northeastern Operations to meet with employees and facility managers in this area.

During this visit Mr. Jones presented the first ORM “Employer of Choice” award to Northeastern Operations staff in acknowledgement of their contributions to foster improved customer service to our internal and external customers and to recognize the significant contributions the employees made to ORM during the past year. ■

ORM ADR Program

By LaMont Johnson, ADR Program Manager

ORM had a very successful year in advancing the use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in VA. The following are highlights of the efforts taking place to improve VA employee awareness of alternative dispute resolution – mediation – as a means to address workplace disputes.

- As a result of the agency wide ADR awareness training initiative we can report the following:

Department-Wide – 150,541 employees trained (out of 163,940 total employees). This represents 91.8% of the targeted employees.

The Secretary's goal was to have 80 percent of VA employees trained by the close of fiscal year 2004 and 100 percent employees trained by 2008.

- Establishing an Ombudsman Program for internal complaints. The purpose of the program is to provide ORM employees another resource to use for early intervention and resolution of their issues and concerns related to the workplace.
- Compiled a registry of VA mediators and ADR Coordinators. The registry will serve as a ready resource for anyone seeking mediators within the VA. The registry is available on ORM's Web site www.va.gov/orm.
- ORM has also posted on-line links on our Web site to other ADR resources to assist VA organizations. The *Directory of Sites for ADR Links*, created by ORM, is an excellent guide and resource to ADR.
- ORM revised its ADR Policy and the DAS for ORM released a memorandum to all ORM employees reaffirming his commitment and support of ORM's ADR policy. The ADR policy encourages the use of mediation to resolve workplace disputes and our ADR Program provides resources to resolve disputes in a timely and cost efficient manner.

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Developed an ADR Poster and ADR Fact Sheet/Brochure, each was sent via e-mail to Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and National Cemetery Administration ADR Coordinators. ORM is encouraging VA administrations to publish and distribute the brochures and posters as part of their ADR marketing campaigns.

- Updated *Notice of Informal/Formal EEO Contacts to Facility Directors* to include offers of mediation. EEO counselors and investigators are currently using similar documents that encourage the use of ADR at each stage of the EEO complaint process.
- Developed an ADR Checklist/Script for all of its EEO counselors to ensure a consistent message is being conveyed about ADR. The script provides education and marketing information/materials on ADR to all aggrieved individuals and responding management officials.

To track ADR activity, ORM:

- Prepares an ADR Quarterly Report that is submitted to the office of Dispute Resolution Specialist. The report was revised to capture ADR data on each VA field facility. Previously only data for VISN's was included.
- ADR Program Managers provided ADR input to ORM's IT workgroup for the revised Web Based Tracking System (WBTS). ADR data will be analyzed annually so benchmarks can be identified and accomplishments measured. Recommendations included additional ADR data fields added to the WBTS.

VA was also selected by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to be a part of a study on factors that influence the effectiveness of ADR in resolving federal sector EEO disputes. Some of the other agencies that participated in the study are the Departments of the Air Force, Army, Education, Justice, Labor, State and the U.S. Postal Service. EEOC is analyzing the data to identify best practices that will be published in a final report. ■

FY 2004 Complaint Processing Milestones

ORM achieved the following milestones in fiscal year 2004:

- One of our strategic goals for fiscal year (FY) 2004 was to reduce our inventory of cases pending over 180 days. We implemented an aggressive Centralized Investigative Process to address these cases, resulting in a reduction in this inventory to 21 cases as of September 30, 2004 compared to 230 cases pending in FY 2003 and 332 pending in FY 2002.
- Our average processing time to complete counseling without ADR was 29.5 days compared to 28 days in FY 2003.
- Counseling with ADR was completed in an average of 71.3 days.
- Procedural reviews were completed in an average of 72.1 days in FY 2004. We also completed 2,631 procedural reviews during this period compared to 2,267 in FY 2003. ■

ORM ELECTONIC CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

ORM has been granted approval from the Office of Information Technology to proceed with the development of our Electronic Case Management System. This system will enable us to move to a “paperless” EEO complaint file environment resulting in substantial savings in the storage and movement of our existing paper files.

QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAM

The Quality Assurance Program (QAP), headed by Peggy Joyner, QA Manager, was instituted in fiscal year 2003 to assess compliance with EEO Regulations and ORM's Standard Operating Procedures for processing complaints of employment discrimination within ORM. The Quality Assurance (QA) staff consists of a Program Manager and two Program Specialists.

During FY 2004, quality monitors were established to assess the quality of ORM products. These monitors will be utilized to conduct monthly reviews of complaint processing activity in each field office and to provide more comprehensive complaint processing information to field managers, ORM management and VA.

QA is researching the installation of a call monitoring system to monitor calls to our nation-wide toll free telephone number. This system will be utilized to ensure that appropriate information is being disseminated to callers and to ensure that quality customer service is provided. The QA Manager is working with the Office of General Counsel on the legality of establishing such a system.

In the current fiscal year (2005), the QA goal is to review each discipline of the complaint process – Counseling, Intake and Investigation – in an effort to make any necessary improvements in the way in which ORM processes discrimination complaints.

QA is also working on alterations to the existing Web Based Tracking System (WBTS). The WBTS is ORM's existing complaint tracking and reporting system. This system has been in use since September 2000 and is currently being reviewed for future transformation into an electronic case management system. The QA staff is working closely with ORM's Information Technology (IT) staff in order to accomplish this task. ORM has also been asked to demonstrate this system to other Federal agencies.

The QA staff is responsible for producing comparison charts of EEO activity by fiscal year. Comparisons are charted for both informal and formal complaint activities for the three Administrations and VACO. These charts are not intended to provide an in-depth analysis of the reasons complainants initiate counseling or why they elect to file formally, but rather are a comparison of complaint activity. Insight as to the reasons for individuals initiating contact or filing formal complaints can be found in the "Root Cause Report" located on ORM's web site. QA is also developing a Web site to disseminate information on its program. ■



Office Notes

Operation Lend a Helping Hand

A big “thank you” goes out to the employees of the DAS’ staff and the Washington Field Office who contributed to “Operation Lend a Helping Hand.” Donations to this very worthwhile effort to share with those less fortunate during the Thanksgiving holiday, along with donations collected by Diana Hannah of VBA’s Washington Field Office, assisted two families and a church group in the Washington, DC, area. The families included a mother with 12 children (ages 1 month to 17 years) and a single father with three children. Donated items included food, toys, clothes, and books. This effort will continue into the Christmas holiday to collect toys for needy kids in local homeless shelters. Again, thanks to everyone who made this effort a huge success, especially [Denise Bond](#) of the DAS’ staff who coordinated this event with Ms. Hannah.

ORM “SALUTE” Program

The following appeared in the VACO News on November 30, 2004. “Just after September 11, 2001, the Office of Resolution Management (ORM) began its “SALUTE” program to honor and recognize each ORM employee called to active duty from the military reserve forces to serve on active duty. Each ORM employee called to active duty is honored by James S. Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management upon return to VA with a certificate signed by Secretary Principi, an ORM proclamation and an eagle plaque. Those who serve more than a year on active military duty receive a U.S. flag flown over the Capitol.

Mr. Jones recently received the “Above and Beyond Award” from the District of Columbia Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. Other VA Central Office managers honored by the Employer Support program included VA Homeless Programs Director Peter Dougherty, Dr. Richard Sniffer, and Keri Childress, now public affairs officer at the Palo Alto, Calif., VA Medical Center.”

[Ernestine Richardson](#), Office of Policy and Compliance, suggested the creation of this program and is coordinating this effort in ORM.

THANK YOU!

To the employees of ORM, Human Resources & Administration, General Counsel, and the Office of Management and Budget, "thank you" for the support you have provided to me and my family after our recent tragic house fire. Your kindness is greatly appreciated. We were fortunate that no one was home when the house caught fire. We are also blessed to be surrounded by warm, caring people like you!
Carmen Hoge, ORM Budget Officer.

BECAUSE OF THE SEASON HERE IS MY REASON

I would like to take this opportunity to "thank" the staff of Northeastern Operations for the kindness displayed while I was out on LWOP for my surgery prior to approval for the leave transfer program.

I appreciate the leave donated and the two staff members that helped me get my medicine and the groceries brought to my home.

Since I became an employee of ORM in 2001 there has been nothing but caring displayed to me and I have made new friends.

Cecelia Stark was my mentor, and because of her I have learned a lot about the EEO process and Amelia McCottry was always there for me when I had questions that needed an answer.

Once again, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I wish to take this time to also wish each and every one of you a joyous holiday.

Carol Williams, EEO Assistant, Lyons Field Office

DAS for Resolution Management Visits Western Operations

On November 16, 2004, the DAS for Resolution Management began a four day trip to visit the three offices comprising the Western Operations area of ORM. The visit consisted of meetings with the ORM personnel in Vancouver, WA, Palo Alto, CA, and Los Angeles, CA. Mr. Jones also met key management officials at each of the locations.

During meetings with employees, the DAS acknowledged the contributions and sacrifices that employees made toward the significant accomplishments that ORM realized this year. He held open forum discussions at each of the offices that allowed employees to ask questions and give feedback on issues of interest to them. The employees were very receptive and the discussions were lively and very beneficial.

Additionally, while in Vancouver, Mr. Jones met with Dr. Burger, Director VISN 20. He also met with Elizabeth Freeman, Director VAMC Palo Alto during his visit there, and Charles Dorman, Director Greater LA Health Care while in LA. Each of these visits was used to reassure these key stakeholders of ORM's commitment to assist their facilities in efforts to improve environments. Mr. Jones reiterated the availability of ORM services as they pursue ways of addressing disputes that arise in their facilities.

Office of the COO

[Linda Heard](#), Administrative Assistant to the COO, accepted a position with the Internal Revenue Service. Her departure, at the end of November, was acknowledged with a luncheon at a local restaurant and with cake and a gift at an in-office gathering. We wish Linda success in her new position.

Leadership VA (LVA)

[Charlotte Jones](#), Enterprise Manager, recently completed Leadership VA. *Congratulations Charlotte!*

Southeastern Operations

Congratulations to [Diana Ford](#), EEO Investigator, on her selection as a participant in the "Competency Development for Leaders in the 21st Century" training program. This VISN-wide leadership program is based on the High Performance Development Model and each module focuses on one of eight core competencies. *Congratulations Diana.*

AFGE National Conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico

ORM was invited to be a presenter at the AFGE National Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, November 9 and 10, 2004. This event brought together approximately 500 AFGE shop stewards, members and others. Mr. Jones, DAS for ORM, and other ORM program managers made two presentations – ORM: Complaint Processing and Creating Employer of Choice Environment and Alternative Dispute Resolution: What’s Happening in VA?

Mr. Jones also participated on a panel discussion by the Office of Dispute Resolution to discuss ADR issues during the conference. Northeastern Regional Manager, [Rosa Franco](#) presented two sessions regarding the complaint process – “C” *Case Method of Investigation* – at the conference.

ORM Senior Managers Meeting

ORM had a very successful senior managers meeting the week of October 25 -29, 2004, in Crystal City, VA. Tim S. McClain, who was Acting Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration at that time, spoke to the group on October 28, 2004. Mr. McClain presented a number of challenges to ORM that included continued efforts to: help reduce the number of formal complaints in VA; help reduce the number of cases in VA where there are findings of discrimination; maintain service levels with current budget and FTE; and eliminate formal EEO complaints in ORM. ORM is developing action items to address these and other issues of importance identified during this meeting.

Another highlight of the meeting was the one day “Action Learning Exercise” in Charlottesville, VA. This team building exercise, involving rope climbing and other exercises, develops and encourages improved cooperation and support amongst the participants.

Mid-Atlantic Operations

Mid-Atlantic Operations and Learning Resources hosted video teleconference (V-Tel) training for ORM Intakes Specialists. Lecturers included attorneys from the Office of General Counsel, Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication and an Intake Specialist from Northeastern Operations. Topics included “Failure to State a Claim” and “Collateral Attacks on OWCP Claims.”

Central Plains Operations

Employees of Central Plains Operations provided “EEO Complaint Process and Orientation to Services Provided by ORM” training to 100 employees of the Canteen Services Headquarters in St. Louis, MO during the week of November 8-12, 2004.

Western Operations

Deborah Garbe, EEO Investigator, was complimented by Diane Anderson, EEO Manager, Puget Sound Health Care System, for a recent investigation. Ms. Anderson stated that Deborah's investigation was succinctly worded, easy to read and provided all the necessary information in a professional and well written manner.

Marcia Rosner, EEO Assistant, joined Western Operations on November 8, 2004. She brings more than 20 years of administrative experience to the organization. Her last assignment before joining ORM was with the Transportation Security Administration at the Los Angeles International Airport.

Yvonne Viall, began work on November 15, 2004 at our Vancouver office as an EEO Assistant. Yvonne has already begun to learn a great deal and is a welcomed addition to the Western Operations family.

Six Western Operations counselors recently completed the "Basic Investigator Course" portion of their investigator training. Each has now been assigned an investigation and a mentor to assist them in conducting their investigations. **Karen Civitate**, Learning Resources, ORM, conducted the training and was extremely knowledgeable, professional and helpful. The counselors felt that the training was excellent and are eager to work on their investigations.

Inauguration Day, January 20, 2005

Due to the Presidential inauguration on January 20, 2005, the Federal government will be closed for employees who work in DC and nearby Maryland and Virginia cities and counties.

Did You Know?

R. Allen Pittman Appointed Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration

On November 30, 2004, the President appointed R. Allen Pittman to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration. Mr. Pittman was officially sworn in by the Secretary the same day.

In this capacity, Mr. Pittman oversees and directs both policy and operational functions in five major program areas: human resources management, diversity programs, EEO complaints resolution (ORM), labor management relations, and VA Central Office administration. He also serves as VA's designated agency safety and health official.



You Can Register Your Government and Private Cell Phone on the Do Not Call Registry

A directory of cell phone numbers will be published soon. This opens the door to solicitors calling our cell phones using up our minutes. The Federal Trade Commission has set up a do not call list. You must call FROM the number you wish to register. The number is 1-888-382-1222, OR you can click on the link below to register your cell phones on-line.

<https://www.donotcall.gov/register/Reg.aspx>

If you have a government issued cell phone, please take the time and register your phone on the "DO NOT CALL REGISTRY". This is not restricted to government issued cell phones. If you wish, you can also register your personal cell phone. *Kevin Thomas, ITS*

*From the Deputy Assistant
Secretary for ORM
And his Staff*



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(202) 501-2800 concerning the contents of this newsletter. Copies of this newsletter
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